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O 180940Z MAY 06
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3402
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 9639
RUEHJA/AMEMBASSY JAKARTA 0568
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 9200
RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK 2976
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 6091
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 4126
RUEHKL/AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR 0293
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 6645
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 4536
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 0352
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1193
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0388
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUHBABA/CG III MEF CAMP COURTNEY JA
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JCS WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 COLOMBO 000814

SIPDIS

STATE ALSO PASS TO USAID
DCHA/OFDA GGOTTlieb, MMARX, RTHAYER, BDEEMER
AID/W FOR DCHA/OFDA
DCHA/FFP FOR LAUREN LANDIS
DCHA DEPUTY ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR WILLIAM
GARVELINK
ANE DEPUTY ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR MARK WARD
BANGKOK FOR OFDA SENIOR REGIONAL ADVISOR TOM DOLAN
GENEVA FOR USAID KYLOH
ROME PASS FODAG
NSC FOR MELINE
CDR USPACOM FOR J3/J4/POLAD
USEU PASS USEC

SIPDIS, SENSITIVE

E.O.12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAID](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: POPULATION DISPLACEMENTS DUE TO RECENT
INCREASE IN HOSTILITIES BETWEEN THE SRI LANKAN
GOVERNMENT FORCES AND THE LIBERATION TIGERS OF
TAMIL EELAM (LTTE)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (SBU) OFDA REGIONAL ADVISOR, WILLIAM BERGER
TRAVELED TO SRI LANKA FROM MAY 4 THROUGH MAY 14TH
TO ASSESS REPORTED POPULATION DISPLACEMENTS DUE TO
RECENT INCREASE IN HOSTILITIES BETWEEN THE SRI
LANKAN GOVERNMENT FORCES AND THE LIBERATION TIGERS
OF TAMIL EELAM (LTTE). FINDINGS OF THE ASSESSMENT
WERE THAT WHILE THE CONTINUED ESCALATION OF
HOSTILITIES IN SRI LANKA IS UNFORTUNATE, THE IDP
SITUATION AT THIS TIME DOES NOT EXCEED GSL'S
ABILITY TO RESPOND. THE UN AND OTHER HUMANITARIAN
ACTORS HAVE DEVELOPED CONTINGENCY PLANS AND THERE
ARE SUFFICIENT RESOURCES IN ONGOING TSUNAMI
RESPONSE AND RECONSTRUCTION PROGRAMS TO PROVIDE A
BUFFER IF THESE PLANS REQUIRE ACTIVATION. THE
SITUATION IN SRI LANKA IS LIKELY TO REMAIN
VOLATILE INTO THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE AND WILL
REQUIRE CLOSE MONITORING OF HUMANITARIAN NEEDS.

BACKGROUND

12. (U) OFDA REGIONAL ADVISOR, WILLIAM BERGER TRAVELED TO SRI LANKA FROM MAY 4 THROUGH MAY 14TH TO ASSESS REPORTED POPULATION DISPLACEMENTS DUE TO RECENT INCREASES IN HOSTILITIES BETWEEN THE SRI LANKAN GOVERNMENT FORCES AND THE LIBERATION TIGERS OF TAMIL EELAM (LTTE). WHILE IN SRI LANKA THE RA MET WITH EMBASSY AND USAID MISSION PERSONNEL AS WELL AS UN AGENCIES, GSL, NGOS BOTH LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL AND FIELD STAFF OF THE SRI LANKAN MONITORING MISSION (SLMM). THE TDY INCLUDED A TRIP TO TRINCOMALEE TOWN ON WHICH THE RA WAS JOINED BY STAFF OF USAID'S OFFICE OF TRANSITION INITIATIVES (OTI).

13. (SBU) AS COMMUNITIES JOINED HANDS TO RESPOND TO THE TSUNAMI DISASTER, THERE WAS HOPE THAT OUT OF THAT TRAGEDY MIGHT EMERGE A COUNTRY MORE UNITED BY A GREAT HUMANITARIAN IMPERATIVE. INCREASING INCIDENTS OF COMMUNAL VIOLENCE AND ESCALATING HOSTILITIES BETWEEN THE GSL AND LTTE OVER THE LAST SEVERAL MONTHS HAVE ALL BUT BURIED THOSE HOPES. TRINCOMALEE TOWN, AN INTERFACE AREA OF SINHALA, TAMIL AND MUSLIM COMMUNITIES, IS NOW A TINDER-BOX FOLLOWING THE MURDER OF A TAMIL COMMUNITY LEADER WITHIN METERS OF ARMY AND POLICE COMPOUNDS, A BOMBING IN THE TRINCOMALEE MARKET, THE PROVOCATIVE

COLOMBO 00000814 002 OF 004

PLACEMENT OF A BUDDHA STATUE IN THE MARKET PARKING AREA, AND THE RETALIATORY AIR STRIKES AND SHELLING BY THE SRI LANKAN MILITARY AFTER THE SUICIDE BOMBING IN COLOMBO THAT KILLED SEVERAL PEOPLE AND SEVERELY INJURED THE HEAD OF SRI LANKA'S ARMY.

4(SBU)TO DATE THE GOVERNMENT OF SRI LANKA (GSL) HAS SHOWN A MEASURED RESPONSE TO LTTE PROVOCATIONS AND MANY FEEL THAT ALL OUT RESUMPTION OF HOSTILITIES IS LESS LIKELY THAN A CONTINUED PERIOD OF PERIODIC MILITARY STRIKES AND INCIDENTS OF COMMUNAL VIOLENCE, BUT THE POTENTIAL ALWAYS REMAINS FOR THE SITUATION TO SPIRAL OUT OF CONTROL.

----- IDP SITUATION IN TRINCOMALEE -----

5.(SBU)THERE WERE SEVERAL TYPES OF DISPLACEMENT IN THE TRINCOMALEE AREA LEADING TO LARGE VARIATIONS IN REPORTED IDP NUMBERS DEPENDING ON WHO WAS PROVIDING THE FIGURES AND HOW THEY DEFINED DISPLACEMENT. THERE WAS THE GROUP OF THOSE WHO LOST THEIR HOUSES OR WHO WERE DIRECTLY AFFECTED BECAUSE OF THEIR CLOSE PROXIMITY TO THE AREA BOMBED DURING ATTACKS ON APRIL 25-26. THIS IS THE POPULATION THAT THE GSL IS FOCUSING ON WITH ITS FIGURE OF 3000 PEOPLE DISPLACED. THE HEAD OF THE POLICE IN TRINCOMALEE STATED THAT THE HIGHER NUMBERS REPORTED BY OTHERS WERE PEOPLE WHO JUST WANTED TO GET SOMETHING FOR NOTHING. THIS IS A POINT OF DEBATE BETWEEN LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND THE INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN COMMUNITY WHO CLAIM THAT THE AUTHORITIES ARE NOT PROVIDING SECURITY AND THAT THE CONSEQUENT MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE WITH CONCERNS FOR THEIR SAFETY ARE LEGITIMATE IDPS AND SHOULD BE SUPPORTED. ON THIS BASIS THE UN HAS ESTIMATED THAT THERE ARE APPROXIMATELY 21 THOUSAND IDPS AND THIS NUMBER INCLUDES SOME 8 THOUSAND PEOPLE WHO WERE DISPLACED BY COMMUNAL VIOLENCE BEFORE THE BOMBARDMENT TOOK PLACE. SOME IDPS HAVE LEFT THE AREA TO SEEK SHELTER WITH FRIENDS OR FAMILY IN OTHER AREAS. THE MAJORITY WHO HAVE STAYED IN THE AREA ARE DIVIDED INTO GROUPS WHO ARE

DISPLACED TOO FAR FROM HOME TO HAVE ACCESS TO THEIR OWN RESOURCES AND REQUIRE FULL SUPPORT AND THOSE WHO ARE CLOSE ENOUGH TO RETURN HOME IN THE DAY AND MAINLY REQUIRE A SECURE PLACE TO SPEND THE NIGHT. THE LOCAL NATURE OF THE DISPLACEMENT MEANS THAT PEOPLE RETURN HOME AS AND WHEN THEY CAN AND NUMBERS REQUIRING ASSISTANCE FLUCTUATE WITH EVEN SLIGHT CHANGES IN THE SECURITY SITUATION. THE HIGHEST ESTIMATIONS OF DISPLACEMENT, NOW DEBUNKED BY THE UN ASSESSMENT, CAME FROM THE LTTE WHO

COLOMBO 00000814 003 OF 004

CLAIMED OVER 40,000 PEOPLE HAD BEEN DISPLACED. UNFORTUNATELY, THE INTERNATIONAL PRESS PICKED UP ON THIS NUMBER AND CONTINUES TO REPORT IT EVEN THOUGH MORE ACCURATE NUMBERS HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED.

RESPONSE CAPACITY

16. (SBU) THE GENEROUS FUNDING FROM AROUND THE WORLD FOR THE TSUNAMI DISASTER IN SRI LANKA MEANT THAT THERE WERE AVAILABLE RESOURCES IN THE NGO AND INGO COMMUNITY THAT COULD BE TAPPED QUICKLY IN RESPONSE TO THE IDP SITUATION IN TRINCOMALEE. IN FACT, THE NUMBER OF WELL RESOURCED NGOS IN THE AREA HAS LED TO THE CRITICISM OF LACK OF COORDINATION AND AN OVER-SUFFICIENCY OF RESPONSE. UNHCR, HOWEVER, FEELS THAT AFTER THIS EXPERIENCE, COORDINATION WILL IMPROVE IN FUTURE RESPONSES. THIS ISSUE IS OF CONCERN TO LOCAL AUTHORITIES WHO FEAR THAT THE ABUNDANCE OF RESOURCES COULD CREATE A MAGNET FOR INAPPROPRIATE OR PREMATURE DISPLACEMENT OF LOCAL PEOPLE PARTICULARLY SINCE LIVELIHOODS ARE ALREADY UNDER PRESSURE DUE TO THE SECURITY SITUATION. IN THIS REGARD IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT GSL HAS ALLOCATED THE EQUIVALENT OF 1 MILLION US DOLLARS FOR ASSISTANCE TO IDPS AND HAS RECALLED EARLIER REQUESTS FOR WFP FOOD ASSISTANCE SAYING THAT IT PLANS TO SHOULDER THIS BURDEN ON ITS OWN. TO MANY OBSERVERS THIS APPEARS TO BE AN UNEXPECTEDLY GENEROUS RESPONSE ON THE PART OF GSL, PARTICULARLY GIVEN LOCAL AUTHORITIES? NARROW DEFINITION AND CONSEQUENT LOW IDP NUMBERS, AND THERE IS SKEPTICISM ABOUT GSL'S ABILITY TO EQUITABLY DELIVER ITS PROPOSED ASSISTANCE ON THE GROUND.

17. (SBU) THE USAID TEAM MET WITH THE SENIOR SUPERINTENDENT OF POLICE IN TRINCOMALEE, MR. ANANDA SAMARAKOON, WHO HAS THE UNENVIABLE JOB OF TRYING TO KEEP THE PEACE AMONG ALL FACTIONS. HE STATED THAT EVEN THOUGH 700 ADDITIONAL OFFICERS HAVE BEEN DEPLOYED TO THE AREA, ALL FORCES ARE WORKING WITHOUT TIME OFF OR LEAVE. THERE SEEMS TO BE NO CONTINGENCY PLAN ON THE PART OF THE POLICE TO PROVIDE ADEQUATE RESPITE FROM THE STRESS AND RELENTLESS SCHEDULE. UNDER THIS PRESSURE AND THE NEED TO WEAR BODY ARMOR IN THE STIFLING HEAT OF TRINCOMALEE, IT IS EASY TO UNDERSTAND HOW THE POLICE MIGHT OVER-REACT OR RESPOND PRECIPITOUSLY TO SITUATIONS THAT REQUIRE PATIENCE AND CLEAR THINKING. AN OVERSTRETCHED AND STRESSED POLICE FORCE IS EVEN MORE UNFORTUNATE IN THAT LOCAL PEOPLE HAVE NO TRUST FOR THE MILITARY, WHICH ONLY

COLOMBO 00000814 004 OF 004

ADDS PRESSURE FOR THE POLICE AS THE MAIN SECURITY PROVIDERS FOR IDPS. THE POLICE ARE MAKING EFFORTS SUCH AS TAMIL LANGUAGE TRAINING TO SENSITIZE STAFF AND CREATE MORE TRUST WITH NON-SINHALESE COMMUNITIES. OTI ENCOURAGED THE DSS SENIOR

SUPERINTENDENT TO DO MORE TO MAKE THE PUBLIC AWARE OF SUCH EFFORTS.

18. (SBU) GIVEN THE DETERIORATING SECURITY SITUATION IN SOME PARTS OF SRI LANKA THE UN AND ALL MAJOR HUMANITARIAN ACTORS ARE CURRENTLY MAKING CONTINGENCY PLANS FOR POTENTIAL IDP SCENARIOS BUT THIS IS A CHALLENGING EXERCISE GIVEN THE UNCERTAIN POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT, HUGE AREA OF THE COUNTRY WHERE PROBLEMS COULD DEVELOP AND DIFFICULTIES OF REACHING COMMUNITIES IN INSECURE AREAS. SEVERAL ORGANIZATIONS ALSO NOTED THAT, HISTORICALLY, BREAKTHROUGHS IN PEACE NEGOTIATIONS CAN BRING ABOUT AN ALMOST IMMEDIATE AND COMPLETE CESSATION OF VIOLENCE. THOUGH FEW HOLD OUT HOPE FOR A BREAKTHROUGH IN THE PEACE PROCESS, THE ABILITY OF THE SITUATION TO ?TURN ON A DIME? EVEN FOR THE BETTER, CREATES A RELUCTANCE TO TOO QUICKLY BUILD UP LARGE RESPONSE PROGRAMS THAT REQUIRE LONG-TERM COMMITMENTS OF HUMAN AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES AND THAT COULD ALSO IMPACT COUNTRY AS WELL AS GLOBAL PROGRAMS. FORTUNATELY, THIS PROBLEM IS MITIGATED SOMEWHAT BY THE SIGNIFICANT RESOURCES AVAILABLE THROUGH ONGOING TSUNAMI PROGRAMS.

CONCLUSIONS

19. (SBU) WHILE THE CONTINUED ESCALATION OF HOSTILITIES IN SRI LANKA IS UNFORTUNATE, THE IDP SITUATION DOES NOT EXCEED GSL'S ABILITY TO RESPOND. THE UN AND OTHER HUMANITARIAN ACTORS HAVE DEVELOPED CONTINGENCY PLANS AND THERE ARE SUFFICIENT RESOURCES IN ONGOING TSUNAMI RESPONSE AND RECONSTRUCTION PROGRAMS TO PROVIDE A BUFFER IF THESE REQUIRE ACTIVATION. THE SITUATION IN SRI LANKA IS LIKELY TO REMAIN VOLATILE INTO THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE AND WILL REQUIRE CLOSE MONITORING OF HUMANITARIAN NEEDS.
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